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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/19/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [SL](#)  
SUBJECT: SLPP RADIO SILENCED FOR THE MOMENT

Classified By: Ambassador June Carter Perry for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (U) On May 8, Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) officials were informed that one of their primary media outlets, Unity Radio, had been silenced on the orders of the Minister of Information and Communication. Reasons cited for removing the radio's antenna, which effectively cut their nation-wide signal, included allegations that the antenna was erected illegally and that the strength of its signal was interfering with emission from other stations. The SLPP contests the government's claims, and documentation provided by both sides does little to clarify the situation.

¶2. (U) Despite this lack of clarity, all parties are waging a war of words in the press. Several meetings between high-ranking government officials and SLPP executives were delayed in the days following the shut-down, but the Vice President chaired an in camera meeting on May 15. The meeting resulted in the creation of a committee to look into the situation, which will be chaired by the Independent Media Commission, but an immediate resolution to get Unity back on the air remains was not found.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: Radio is the most significant media outlet in Sierra Leone, and one of great importance to all political parties in the run-up to the July 5 local elections. Regardless of blame, SLPP supporters are agitating for Unity's resurrection, and accusations that the All People's Congress (APC)-led government is deliberately sabotaging the SLPP's efforts to conduct public outreach are already being reported. However, a situation that could easily have boiled over into unrest has remained a tempest in a teapot. Despite initial warnings of possible violence and pointing fingers from all sides, the creation of a formal entity to address the situation has brought a measure of calm to the situation. This possibly reflects consistent messages from members of the international community that hot tempers in the pre-election period, despite alleged provocation, must be controlled for the good of the country. END COMMENT.  
PERRY